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Focus on the Media

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Media Ignore Soviet Contacts with Iran

As if the disclosures of the President's Iran initiative weren't causing enough problems for the Administration, the Washington Post on November 19 published a story about CIA operations involving Iran. Not surprisingly, the story was written by Bob Woodward, the former Watergate reporter who now specializes in exposing U.S. intelligence activities.

The 26th paragraph of the 28-paragraph story said, "A CIA memo of May 17, 1985, saying that the United States was lagging behind the Soviets in cultivating Iranian contacts for a post-Khomeini era, was apparently one of the first actions that led to Reagan's decision to begin secret overtures to the Iranians and eventually to ship them arms this year."

Why was this explosive bit of information so far down in the story?

The information was preceded by Woodward's statement that Soviet operations in Iran suffered a

major blow in 1983 when the Communist party of Iran was outlawed, its members arrested, and a number of Soviet KGB agents expelled from the country. Woodward said this resulted from information provided to Khomeini by the CIA and obtained from a KGB defector who had been based in Teheran.

What Woodward doesn't point out is that since then, Soviet-Iranian relations have greatly improved and that the May 17, 1985, CIA memo is obviously correct.

The Soviets have an initial advantage over the U.S. due to the fact that they have an embassy in Teheran and we don't. An embassy can serve as a base of operations for espionage and intelligence activities.

Moreover, diplomatic activities involving the two countries are increasing. One Administration official told me that "eyebrows were raised" in Washington this year when a series of middle- and upper-level diplomatic exchanges took place. For example, the Soviet deputy foreign minister visited Iran in February, and the Iranian deputy foreign minister visited Moscow in August.

Foreign Report, a publication of the *Economist* of London, says negotiations are under way that could result in the resumption of Iranian natural gas exports to the Soviet Union. Soviet President Andrei Gromyko has promised the Khomeini government that Soviet technicians will return to the country to work on a major electricity project. They were withdrawn in 1985 on the grounds that they were endangered by the fighting in the Iran-Iraq war.

The Soviets are the major arms suppliers of Iraq in that war, but Administration sources report that the Soviets have also made some shipments to Iran, and that the Soviet-bloc countries have supplied some weapons to the Khomeini regime.